

Hobbies

Iowa's birthday bash coming up a few half dollars short

By Roger Boye

Hawking expensive coins during a recession can be tough, even for the state of Iowa.

After nearly four months, a state foundation has sold—for \$500 each—just 33 of 500 old half dollars that are stored in a Des Moines bank vault. Officials want to unload all 500 and use the proceeds to help finance the

Hawkeye state's 150th birthday celebration in 1996.

"We're hoping that between now and '96, with an improved economy, we'll get more orders," said Steven F. Miller, Iowa deputy treasurer, whose office is co-ordinating the unusual program.

Officials had planned to hold a drawing on Oct. 1 to determine which orders to fill because some people thought there might be a

buying rush during the first three months of the campaign. But a drawing wasn't needed due to the dearth of sales.

Uncle Sam made 100,000 half dollars in 1946 for Iowa's centennial, and the state salted away 1,000 of the very best specimens. All of the coins rate "uncirculated," but they haven't been professionally graded.

Experts use 11 categories to

classify uncirculated coins, ranging from "mint state—typical" (or "MS-60") to "mint state—perfect" (or "MS-70"). An Iowa commemorative half dollar in the "MS-65" category is about \$150 on the hobby market.

Miller refused to speculate about what Iowa might do if it fails to sell all 500 coins. "It'll be up to [a state] commission. I don't want to start any rumors."